

Shelter Cluster Ukraine East Hub Donetska Oblast

Solid Fuel Monitoring Mission 22nd-23rd December 2025

Introduction

On 22–23 December 2025, the Shelter Cluster East Hub team conducted a monitoring mission together with partners, including a series of interviews with beneficiaries receiving winter energy assistance in two hromadas of Donetska oblast. The purpose of the mission was to carry out the Cluster’s core monitoring and evaluation functions, with a specific focus on solid fuel assistance.

The East Hub team would like to express its gratitude to Angels of Salvation (AoS), Avalyst, Solidar Suisse (SSU) and its implementing partner LAOOI, People in Need (PIN), and UNHCR for their availability and participation in the monitoring visit.

Monitoring Mission Schedule:

22 December: Meetings with recipients of in-kind solid fuel assistance provided by AoS and Avalyst in three settlements of Slovianska hromada (Holubivka, Bylbasivka, Sloviansk).

23 December: Meetings with recipients of cash and in-kind solid fuel assistance provided by SSU (LAOOI), PIN, and UNHCR in Oleksandrivka, Oleksandrivska hromada.

Context

16 organizations operated in Donetska Oblast in a context of decreasing access and evacuations to provide solid fuel and cash equivalent to those households unable to evacuate, those who have decided to stay, and those who have returned after previously not being able to afford the cost of living in their areas of displacement. Within the context of Donetska Oblast, two partners worked principally according to the lists collected by regional authorities under Resolution No. 985, while the majority worked through hromadas based on their own needs assessments and targeting processes. Towards the end of the winter season two additional organizations with additional funding capacity began to also seek to cover gaps identified by the Cluster team and Oblast authorities under the resolution.

The post-monitoring was based on semi-structured interviews. In total, **11 interviews** were conducted, including **8 beneficiaries receiving in-kind solid fuel assistance** (6 receiving sunflower briquettes and 2 receiving wooden briquettes) and **3 beneficiaries receiving cash assistance for solid fuel**.

Process, Timelines, and Information Sharing

Registration for winter energy assistance was most commonly initiated through local authorities. In nine out of eleven cases, registration was ultimately conducted directly by the assisting organization, either by phone or in person, with most beneficiaries initially identified through local authorities and subsequently contacted by the organization; in two cases, beneficiaries-initiated contact with the organization themselves. Several beneficiaries, all assisted by the same organization, reported being familiar with the organization from previous assistance or through information shared by neighbours, indicating a strong informational presence in the area. Beneficiaries assisted through these approaches generally demonstrated moderate to good understanding of the assisting organization and the overall assistance process.

The remaining two beneficiaries, who received cash assistance under Resolution No. 985, reported no direct contact with the assisting organization, having been registered exclusively through local authorities. This resulted in a more superficial understanding of the assistance process and limited awareness of the assisting organization. While this reflects strong involvement of local authorities in the response, reliance on this channel alone may limit access to information or registration for some individuals, particularly if information is not proactively shared or if beneficiaries are hesitant to approach local authorities.

In terms of timelines, most beneficiaries reported receiving assistance in November. One household received assistance in October, but only as a first batch, with additional assistance expected at a later stage, while one household received assistance in December. For most organizations, assistance was delivered approximately one month after registration. In other cases, assistance was provided

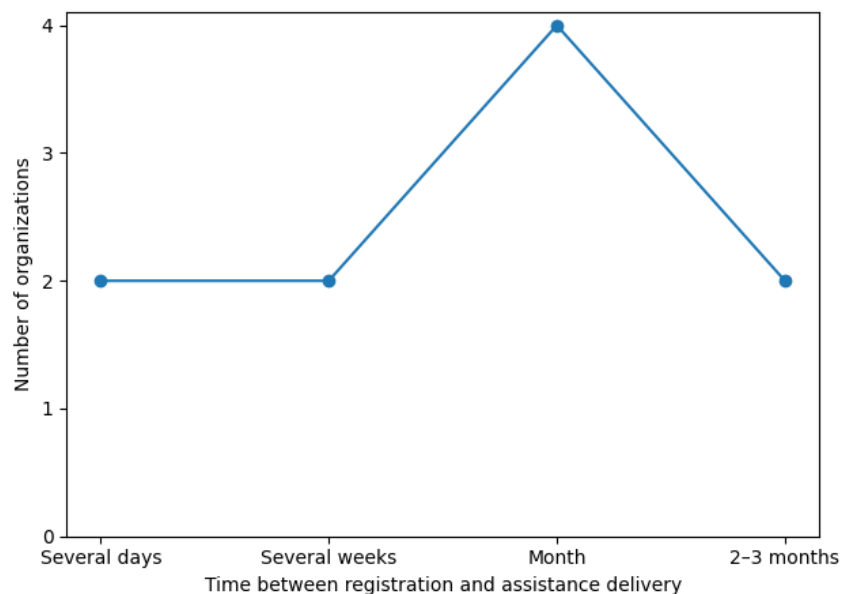


Figure 1. Duration Between Registration and Assistance Delivery

within several days (two households), several weeks (two households), or after two to three months (two households registered under the Resolution).

Five households reported not knowing why they had been selected for assistance, including two beneficiaries receiving cash assistance under Resolution No. 985. In one case, a recipient of cash who was registered through the resolution stated that she had applied jointly with her neighbor, but that her neighbor had not received any of the assistance yet, and she was not clear on why that was. The remaining beneficiaries demonstrated a generally good understanding of the selection criteria. Several households also reported having been registered for solid fuel assistance, either in cash or in-kind modality, with other organizations but were either found ineligible based on selection criteria or removed from assistance following deduplication with the organization that ultimately provided the support. Their statements indicated that communication from these organizations was clear.

Accountability

Most beneficiaries receiving in-kind assistance (6 out of 8) demonstrated awareness of the assisting organization, including knowledge of the organization's name, as well as knowledge of hotline numbers and reporting channels, and confirmed receipt of additional Feedback, Complaint and Response Mechanism (FCRM) materials. Several households assisted by the same organization in Sloviansk reported having contacted the organization directly to request assistance, indicating a generally high level of community awareness, either through prior knowledge of the organization or information shared by neighbors.

The two remaining beneficiaries were not aware of the organization's name and reported not receiving any communication materials. This may be partially linked to the fact that other household members, who were more actively involved in communication with the organization, were not present during the interviews. One beneficiary associated the received assistance with government support, while another, although unable to name the organization, was able to identify it contextually by linking it to previous assistance received, namely winter NFIs provided by the same organization.

Overall, this suggests that in-kind assistance modalities, which involve more direct interaction with beneficiaries, may contribute to higher levels of awareness regarding the assistance provided and the organizations delivering it.

By contrast, none of the beneficiaries who received cash assistance demonstrated awareness of the assisting organization or knew how to contact it directly, despite being informed that the cash was intended for solid fuel. This may be linked to the strong role of local authorities in the assistance provision process, as well as the fact that primary

registration was conducted at the district administrative centres in the presence of local authorities, with the organization providing the cash having limited or no direct contact with beneficiaries. In addition, beneficiaries receiving cash did not report receiving any communication materials explaining the assistance or providing organizational contact details. Such beneficiaries received an SMS that informed that they had received the intended amount without any information concerning the organization or how to contact the organization's hotline for follow-up support.

One interview with a beneficiary who received cash assistance outside the Resolution framework was conducted in the presence of a local authority representative, who responded to part of the questions, and was therefore excluded from this part of the analysis.

Households met during the monitoring visits included individuals who met various vulnerability criteria, as outlined in the Shelter Cluster winterization recommendations. These included elderly pensioners, persons with chronic diseases, persons with physical or mental disabilities, and unemployed persons. During the visits, it was noted that, given the deteriorating security situation in the Oblast and the resulting reduction in services and employment opportunities, many households were experiencing a sense of isolation. Two households mentioned specifically that they had family that had either left the Oblast to other cities in Ukraine or even to other countries. The monitoring visits therefore also provided an important opportunity for households to share their situations and highlight additional needs. In one case, a household was identified as having a clear need for additional health services, and the Shelter Cluster team recommended that the organization collect further information and either refer the case to the Health Cluster or share the details with the Shelter Cluster team for onward referral. Cash recipients, as highlighted earlier, who did not have direct contact with humanitarian organizations, appeared to have a particular need for improved awareness of available humanitarian programmes and options. Overall, the monitoring visits indicated that elements of protection mainstreaming and accountability to affected populations (AAP) were insufficiently integrated in programmes relying predominantly on cash modalities.

Winter Heating Assistance at a time of increased evacuations and displacement

Given the increasingly deteriorating security situation in the Oblast, the monitoring mission also sought to understand solid fuel recipients' intentions with regard to potential evacuation. Several households reported that they had already attempted to self-evacuate in previous years. One household had temporarily relocated to Vinnytsia but returned due to the unaffordable cost of living. Another household had already been displaced within Donetsk Oblast and indicated that they were waiting to see how the situation would evolve

before deciding whether to self-evacuate further. While several households were aware of available evacuation services, many expressed ambivalence, citing a strong need to remain in their homes and a lack of clarity about where they would end up if they evacuated. Some households mentioned the possibility of joining relatives in other parts of Ukraine, if necessary, though at present they had no concrete plans to move. Households consistently highlighted that the security situation was particularly challenging at night. During the monitoring mission, an increased military presence was observed in civilian and residential areas.

Heating

Three beneficiaries receiving in-kind assistance reported having gas supply in their households. One beneficiary indicated gas as the primary source of heating, with briquettes and other solid fuel used as complementary assistance to increase warmth. The remaining two households reported having functional gas supply but not using it as a primary or sole heating source due to high costs or existing household debt.

All other households receiving in-kind assistance reported stove heating as their primary source of heating. In addition, all beneficiaries receiving cash assistance reported stove heating as their primary source of heating. *It is worth noting though that all cash assistance recipients were from the same village, where gas heating is generally not common.*

In Oleksandrivska Hromada, it was stated that due to frequent electricity cuts, the hromada had used solid fuel stoves donated by an organization to improve heating in multistory buildings. In order to ensure ventilation, additional piping was provided which would help such households to cook and heat their homes despite the long electricity cuts. These facilities were not visited during the monitoring visit but are recommended for future monitoring given the number of multistory buildings that were impacted by blackouts to evaluate how these programs helped households to cope in a period of extreme blackouts during winter.

Additional Types of Solid Fuel and Preferred Heating

Most households reported firewood and coal as their preferred and traditionally used types of solid fuel. This observation may be linked to the types of solid fuel that have been traditionally available in these locations, including those accessible during previous winter seasons. Seven out of eleven households interviewed had existing stocks of solid fuel that they had either purchased independently or retained from previous years' assistance, in some cases amounting to several tons.

In addition, beneficiaries noted that ignition of sunflower briquettes requires the use of firewood, which further reinforces reliance on wood as a complementary fuel. Only one respondent mentioned briquettes as a typical source of solid fuel normally used in the household.

Amount of In-Kind Assistance

Out of eight beneficiaries receiving in-kind assistance, four confirmed, or were reasonably able to confirm, receipt of 3.44 tons of briquettes, in line with Cluster recommendations (one beneficiary reported receiving 80 bags of briquettes, which corresponds to the quantities indicated by other beneficiaries). Three households, all assisted by the same organization, reported receiving 2 tons of briquettes per household, with the organization explaining this approach as an effort to cover a larger number of people in need.

It was notable that these households in particular reported the need to use solid fuel conservatively in order to make it last through the winter months. These households said that their use would depend on whether more temperate or freezing temperatures would occur in the coming months or weeks.

One beneficiary who was expected to receive 3.44 tons reported having received only one ton as a first batch in October. This assistance was used within approximately one month, and by the time of the monitoring visit the household had already been relying on firewood purchased with their own resources for about a month. While it was initially communicated that the remaining assistance would be provided later, no follow-up delivery had taken place at the time of monitoring. The household had not contacted the organization to share his concerns about the quality of solid fuel as compared to last year and the insufficiency of the



Pic 1. Beneficiary's independently purchased firewood

heating source. The organization agreed to follow up with the additional tranches of solid fuel.

All households receiving in-kind assistance were able to indicate the amount of assistance received and reported having been informed of it in advance or demonstrated a general understanding of the quantity provided.

All beneficiaries stated that the received amount would not be sufficient to cover the entire winter period, not accounting for any additional solid fuel already in stock. The estimated amount considered sufficient by beneficiaries ranged from approximately 4 tons up to 7 tons of solid fuel for the winter season. Factors such as household size, number of heated living spaces, and the level of building insulation would need to be considered for a more accurate analysis of these estimates. The only beneficiary who indicated having sufficient fuel for the winter reported gas as the primary heating source.

Most beneficiaries who did not have significant additional fuel stocks, or who started using briquettes as their main fuel following receipt of assistance, reported having already used part of the provided fuel, typically up to one ton by the time of the monitoring visit. This suggests a very rough consumption estimate of approximately one ton of solid fuel per month during colder periods.



Pics 2,3: Sunflower briquettes – close-up; damaged sunflower briquettes inside a bag

It is important to note that the amount of solid fuel required to cover the winter season also depends on the quality of the fuel provided, as well as the need for additional fuel, such as firewood, to ignite briquettes.

Quality of In-Kind Assistance

Out of eight beneficiaries receiving solid fuel, six received sunflower briquettes (from different suppliers) and two received wooden briquettes. Half of the respondents receiving sunflower briquettes reported quality concerns, noting that the briquettes broke apart easily, required a relatively large amount of material to ignite, and were consumed quickly in daily use, while still not fully meeting household heating needs. In addition, some beneficiaries reported receiving briquettes that were already broken, making them difficult or, in some cases, unusable.

One household receiving sunflower briquettes reported an unpleasant smell, while other beneficiaries receiving briquettes from the same supplier did not report this issue. As such, a more representative sample would be required to draw conclusions regarding this aspect,



Pic 4. Stacked wooden briquettes

although briquettes without strong or unpleasant odour would generally be preferable.

The remaining beneficiaries receiving sunflower briquettes did not report any notable quality concerns.

Both beneficiaries who received wooden briquettes assessed them as being of good quality, noting that they did not burn too quickly and required a relatively small amount of material to ignite.

Cash Assistance (Use and Amount)

The amount of cash assistance provided was set at **UAH 19,400**, in line with Cluster standards for the current year. One beneficiary reported receiving **UAH 19,350**, reflecting a reduction due to bank commission fees. Out of three beneficiaries receiving cash assistance, two reported having used the assistance to purchase solid fuel.

One household purchased firewood remaining from a neighbour who was leaving the village due to damage to her house, for a total of UAH 15,000. The beneficiary was unable to indicate the exact quantity of firewood purchased but stated that the fuel would be sufficient when combined with an existing stock of two tons of coal. A local authority representative present for this issue noted that this was a common practice for self-evacuating households who had purchased solid fuel earlier in the year and were not going to be able to use the solid fuel amount and they put it for sale to remaining residents. Partners on the monitoring visit had also stated that they had heard about such activities on their hotline. It was not possible to determine if any of these sales also included previously distributed humanitarian assistance.



Pic. 5: Solid fuel emits from a cash recipient's private house

Another household purchased three tons of coal for approximately UAH 15,000, as well as firewood at a price of UAH 1,800 per cubic metre. The household reported that an additional five cubic metres of firewood, estimated at approximately UAH 10,000, would be required to cover the entire winter period. The beneficiary also noted that the coal purchased was of relatively low quality.

One beneficiary reported not having spent the cash assistance at the time of the interview due to a potential upcoming evacuation, stating that sufficient fuel stocks from previous assistance remained available to heat the entire house. The household reported not using any coping strategies to compensate for a lack of solid fuel.

All interviewed households reported no difficulties in cashing out the assistance, with ATMs reported as functional in Oleksandrivka. It should be noted, however, that Oleksandrivka is an administrative centre of the hromada, and access to ATMs may differ in other settlements within the hromada.

In terms of prices, beneficiaries reported coal costs ranging from approximately UAH 7,000 to 9,000 per ton. Suppliers were reported to have been mostly present in the village during

the summer period, although limited availability of coal was still reported at the time of the monitoring visit in Oleksandrivka. No price or availability information was reported by interviewees for Sloviansk or nearby locations, which may be linked to households being in-kind recipients, as well as to the relatively limited presence of suppliers in the area. Oleksandrivka's access to coal made it unique as compared to other hromadas in Donetsk Oblast where access to coal ended quite some time ago. Oleksandrivska Hromada formerly had 3 operational mines and now there is only one, but like occurred in other parts of the Oblast the quality of the coal has declined in recent years. Beneficiaries stated that coal would be their ideal heating source but that the quality made it a difficult option.

Coping Strategies and Thermal Comfort

Five households reported adopting fuel-saving coping strategies, including limiting intensive use of solid fuel, not heating their homes to maximum comfort levels, or heating living spaces only during the evening or night to extend fuel availability throughout the winter period. One household reported an indoor temperature of approximately 14°C at the time of the interview, stating that they used the heating during the period from the evening until the morning.

One household also tried to enhance the thermal efficiency of their windows by adding plastic sheeting and green mesh in their window to improve the thermal efficiency of old windows which resembled UNHCR's project on rapid thermal kits implemented in frontline areas. In addition to having substandard housing, given the deteriorating security situation in the Oblast, it was notable that several households visited had experienced war-related damage within months of receiving the solid fuel assistance.

Those who had recently received repairs to the thermal envelope noted that this improved the thermal comfort and the burn rate of the solid fuel. Organizations are reminded that



Pic. 6: A recipient of 2MT of briquettes uses plastic sheeting and mesh to cover their windows to improve insulation of their private house.

onsite visits and monitoring of assisted households can enhance comprehensive assistance and thermal comfort of households by also addressing repair needs.

These households included beneficiaries who received both 3.44 tons and 2 tons of briquettes, as well as households with and without pre-existing solid fuel stocks. The remaining beneficiaries reported not adopting fuel-saving strategies, citing the availability of additional solid fuel stocks purchased independently or retained from previous assistance, as described above.

Preferred Modality of Assistance

Among the nine beneficiaries who shared their views on the preferred modality of assistance, eight indicated a preference for the same modality that they had received. One beneficiary expressed a preference for cash assistance over in-kind support, noting that cash would allow for the purchase of both solid fuel and additional materials required for ignition, particularly in the case of sunflower briquettes, which require a significant amount of firewood to ignite.

Some of them also noted that both modalities may be appropriate depending on the context, particularly in relation to the timing of assistance delivery. Cash assistance was described as allowing greater flexibility in terms of preferred fuel types and the ability to combine different fuels.

At the same time, identifying suppliers and arranging purchases may be challenging for certain vulnerable groups, particularly in frontline-adjacent areas, where supplier availability is limited, and prices tend to increase over the winter season.

In addition, population movement in and out of these areas, including temporary or permanent displacement, may affect both the availability and use of solid fuel assistance. In this context, the implementation of winter energy assistance in frontline-adjacent hromadas requires careful consideration. While in-kind solid fuel assistance may pose challenges for households anticipating departure, limited access to reliable suppliers may also constrain the feasibility of cash-based modalities.

Recommendations

Recommendation	To whom
Strengthen needs assessment and targeting to better align assistance modalities with household heating systems. Households using gas as a primary heating source should be considered for cash-for-utilities assistance, while solid fuel assistance should remain prioritized for households relying primarily on stove heating.	Partners

Where feasible, beneficiary preferences regarding fuel type and modality should be systematically captured during registration.	
Improve communication with beneficiaries regarding the assisting organization, the modality provided, selection criteria, and available feedback and complaint mechanisms. Clear and consistent information sharing, particularly in cases where registration is conducted through local authorities, would support better understanding of the assistance process and strengthen accountability.	Partners
Review the adequacy of in-kind solid fuel quantities in relation to household size, housing conditions, insulation levels, and local consumption patterns. Monitoring findings indicate that the currently provided amounts are widely perceived as insufficient to cover the full winter period, particularly for households without additional fuel stocks.	Shelter Cluster, TWIG for Winterization Recommendations
Strengthen quality control measures for solid fuel procurement. Beneficiaries reported differences in the perceived quality of solid fuel, including ease of ignition, durability during use, and the need for additional materials such as firewood. When selecting fuel types, consideration should be given to their suitability in relation to local heating practices and the availability of complementary fuel.	Partners
Carefully assess the appropriateness of cash versus in-kind assistance in frontline-adjacent hromadas. While cash assistance offers flexibility, limited supplier availability, seasonal price increases, and population movement may affect its feasibility. At the same time, in-kind assistance may present challenges for households anticipating displacement. Context-specific modality decisions should therefore be prioritized.	Partners
If possible, schedule additional monitoring visit to households that received solid fuel support and installation of solid fuel heaters in multistory apartment buildings in Oleksandrivska Hromada.	Shelter Cluster team
Conduct onsite visits and household monitoring to support more accurate assessment of household conditions, including thermal comfort (see thermal envelope checklist). Where feasible, address identified repair needs directly, or refer them to other organizations where such needs cannot be covered, to support a more comprehensive response and improved overall thermal comfort.	Partners
Share the results of post-distribution monitoring (PDM) to complement the Shelter Cluster’s monitoring mission report. The PDM Kobo form , data analysis plan , and instructions for use of the Winter PDM tool are available on the Shelter Cluster website.	Partners